

Did the acquisition and expansion of overseas empire create more problems than opportunities for profit?

The English expansion overseas in search of greater profits than could be had at home took on a multitude of differing forms, each with their own individual merits and opportunities. In the established European markets, Christian identity if not political expedience made claims for direct rule impossible, while likewise in the Far East, contact with established and powerful empires - examples being the Mughal Empire in the Indian subcontinent or the Chinese Empire - required delicate diplomacy rather than the meaty violence shown to former Spanish possessions in the Caribbean such as Jamaica. The English were latecomers to international trade - having been preceded by the Venetians and others throughout the ages in the Near East, the Portuguese and Dutch in the Indian and Spice Island trades, Portuguese in Africa, Spanish in Central America and Dutch in the Arctic whaling grounds around Spitzbergen. Even the French Huguenots had established bases in the New World before the first English bridgehead in Virginia. As latecomers therefore it is not surprising that such great efforts were placed in the search for the north-west and north-east passages to India, which would avoid the dangerous and politically-sensitive infringement of Portuguese monopolies along the African coast. Yet all of these missions remained fundamentally missions in search of trade and profit rather than any concerted effort to create settlements or other trappings of empire. What permanent bases were placed by early speculators were merely means to attaining greater ability to safely acquire treasure. Raleigh's project to place settlers on Roanoke Island was without doubt done so in order to greater facilitate the plunder of treasure-laden Spanish shipping returning to Europe via the Gulf of Mexico. Indeed White's mission in 1587 to relieve it was abandoned because the sailors would rather have spent their summer in preying on Spanish shipping than in founding a base for the future. Likewise it was only the lure for gold which led to preliminary bases being built in Newfoundland, and in Roanoke to Lane going inland for 'the discovery of a good Mine, by the goodnesse of God, or a passage to the South-sea, or some way to it, and nothing else can bring this Countrey in request to be inhabited by our nation.'¹

As has been mentioned, all ventures overseas until well into the seventeenth century were sponsored entirely privately, or if they contained Crown money it was the monarch acting as a private investor. Thus the opportunities for profit which existed in successful trading missions existed for the select few who had stakes in the mission from the outset. Chief amongst those must surely be the great London merchants, especially those who clubbed together to form chartered trading companies. Under the terms of all government legislation until the 1651 Navigation Act they effectively maintained monopolies in their specific areas of overseas adventure. Especially successful in their foreign ventures were the Levant, Muscovy and East India Companies, while that serving the West Indies with slaves and Europe with gold was honoured with the title Royal Africa Company due to the direct involvement of the Crown as an investor. An example of this can be easily seen in the fact that on John Hawkins's second slaving voyage he had the use of the huge 700 ton *Jesus of Lübeck* and three other royal vessels, while Frobisher's voyages in search of the north-west passage also attracted royal support, but only after the prospect of mining gold was raised. London trading companies succeeded often despite the crippling costs of voyages in terms of human lives, such that one of the most profitable of all the early voyages to the West African coast was Wyndham's venture in 1553, which returned with only 40 of its 140 original crew, with himself and the chief pilot Pinteado being but two of the casualties. London companies, however, made a great deal of money also in taking advantage of their rivals' weakness, especially in edging into developed markets in Europe due to the

¹ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.208

inability of combatant parties to maintain their commercial advantages. An example could be the English arrival as serious traders in the Mediterranean or Baltic spheres at times when the established Dutch or Spanish carriers were engaged in warfare. Certainly the average of one hundred English ships entering the Baltic between 1604-24 was double the figure of the 1560s, and London-based shipping maintained their control over English trade with the Baltic region in the years between then and 1648. The contrast with after the Peace of Westphalia shows how much the London merchants were benefiting from a favourable political situation as much as from comparative advantage - which their slow and expensive ships clearly did not possess over the fast but lightly-armed Dutch flyboats. Indeed the enormous number of Dutch ships captured between 1652-4 and used in preference to existing merchant ships - 1000 according to the lowest contemporary account - demonstrates the superiority with which they were viewed by the mercantile community. In terms of English trade with extra-European locations the London merchants' position was enhanced by the fact that for much of the period London was the only city in the country which had a sufficiently developed market-place to supply ocean-going ventures with the victuals and other equipment needed for a serious expedition, and then only if the requisite amount of money was provided early enough to pack at the right season and dispatch in good time. On the reverse side, only London had a sufficiently developed market-place to gainfully cope with the colonial goods that were returning from the ships - whether for internal consumption within England or the increasingly prosperous re-export market. Relative geographical proximity to the main centres of European commerce aided this process. The speculators were so successful in terms of American trade at least in finding strong markets for sugar cane that London became more and more a specialist centre for commissioning boats to undertake the triangular trade between London, the Gold Coast and Caribbean.

London did have several disadvantages as regards European markets as well, inasmuch as her geographical proximity to the Netherlands and other competitors meant that London trade was often more vulnerable to privateering from other nations than was the case in Cromwell's Spanish war of 1655-60, with English shipping being attacked from Spain's own ports as well as those of the Spanish Netherlands. The long series of wars from 1689 with the French further increased the threat of piracy on London-bound shipping. It made sense therefore for merchants to prefer to dock their cargoes at other ports further from the main privateer bases, and consequently west-coast ports such as Liverpool and Bristol rose in prominence, even maintaining their market-share in peacetime. The pattern of the winds also made for a greater predominance of west-country ports in the transatlantic trade, due to the fact that the sail from London down the Channel went directly against the prevailing winds and could lose a voyage weeks or even months before it could pick up the Trades which sped it across the ocean. The use of western ports such as Plymouth - 'such a narrow corner of the realm, where a man would think that neither victuals were to be had, nor cask to put them in' - was possible in some circumstances for individual trading ships, yet for full-scale military operations it was hardly possible, especially since the principal royal dockyards were based at Chatham, Woolwich and Tilbury.² Nevertheless despite the inability of western English ports to satisfactorily supply full-scale fleets of ships, merchants were not entirely at the mercy of the London markets for victuals for their ships. In fact the great supplier of provisions to the West Indies in the years between 1670-1720 was Ireland, via ports such as Kinsale and Cork, a trend encouraged by the acts of 1663, 1667 and 1680 which made it impossible to export surplus Irish provisions to England. Later on, the practically-bankrupt New England colonies in particular produced many of foodstuffs that were so needed in the Caribbean after almost completely failing to find markets previously for their goods. In some other cases the switch of some trades away from London was due to the very success of London merchants in their preferred style of business, being

² Rodger: *Guns and sails in English colonisation* p.88

increasingly commission agents working with individual planters and sending chartered ships to collect the produce directly. The inflexibility of such a system which could be seen from the comment of John Molineux to his agent in 1723 that 'I assure you that you miss a hundred hogsheads yearly, consignments for want of a vessel that your friends may rely upon.'³ Although the commission agents dominated the sugar trade so completely that even in the mid-eighteenth century it still handled almost three-quarters of the imported sugar into England, in other markets notably tobacco, opportunistic ships from Liverpool and Bristol increased their share. When Scotland joined with England in 1707 to form the United Kingdom, Scottish ports especially Glasgow were entitled to equally privileged treatment, and by the middle of the eighteenth century, Scotland had taken over half the tobacco market, with London only holding half of the remainder. The western English ports maintained their hold over various other specific trades, such as Bristol in the slave trade. One other reason why London came to lose some of its domination of the English trade - though it must be mentioned that this does not in any way imply that the London trade was shrinking, since it grew such that the number of ships clearing London for North America rose from 43 in 1664 to 114 in 1686 to 130 in 1715⁴ - again stems from the prosperity which trade had brought to both sides of the Atlantic. The rising wealth of the American colonies led in itself in the eighteenth century especially to a demand for British manufactured goods such as Scottish and Irish linens, Lancashire cottons and metalware from the Midlands - all trades which Bristol, Glasgow and Liverpool merchants were well placed to deliver. The merchant fleet required to serve American trades rose enormously in terms of tonnage: from 36,000 tons in 1664 to 70,000 tons in 1686 to 153,000 tons in 1771. Of the total English trade in the period between 1715-7, 73% of the West Indies trade and 66% of the North America trade passed through London, reinforcing the latter's superior position yet clearly showing the influence of provincial ports.⁵

The losers from the expansion in English overseas trading were certainly those who had gained from the centuries-old pattern of trade in the expensive goods from Cathay and India - notably the Venetians, Arabs and other merchants who had been the middle-men between western Europe and the sources of origin for the goods which were coming directly by sea. The burgeoning European trade directly with Asia disrupted and by-passed the patterns of European trade for centuries - without doubt the winners from the status quo stood only to lose from the Age of Exploration. However, this exploration was originally carried out at least partially from the collapse of alternatives for English traders at least to increased colonial trade, given the political instability in Antwerp and other traditional markets. It is noticeable that in each of the colonies planted it was hoped that they would be able to provide the home country with the products which were already lacking in her economy as well as other marketable commodities. The search for alternative trading routes to India to compensate for the loss of the traditional ones included the North-East passage (the resultant Muscovy Company was founded 1555 and grew profitable on the furs, hemp and timber but which suffered greatly from Dutch competition in the seventeenth century) and the North-West passage, which achieved very little apart from mining fool's gold. Yet the very success of the Muscovy Company, as well as the Levant and East India Companies later on, showed that success in trade did not necessarily follow on from the 'forced trade' that was tame colonial markets - though military force was undoubtedly a major factor in whether a sale was achieved or not. The East India Company for example by the end of the seventeenth century was the largest European handler of Asian products, having overtaken the Dutch. In marked contrast to the Americas, the East India Company may have had trading posts, fortified or otherwise, but no plantation colonies to which significant numbers of Englishmen emigrated. Admittedly, the overseas trading companies did

³ Davis: *Rise of the English shipping industry* p.272

⁴ Davis: *Rise of the English shipping industry* p.17

⁵ Davis: *Rise of the English shipping industry* p.17

have obvious government support for them in their ventures, as is shown through the three wars fought with the Dutch between 1652-74, all trading relationships were conducted on a private rather than a public level. In many ways the experience of the East India Company especially illustrates that it was impossible to contract trade outside Europe yet against European competition without having a muscular attitude and a highly supportive government as well. Although East Indiamen were consistently the largest and best-armed of the English merchant marine throughout the period, the Company was excluded from the Spice Islands through a combination of technical inferiority and military actions which European governments did nothing to rectify. English shipping further lost out from the coming of peace after the Thirty Years War, since Dutch *fluit* (flyboats) were smaller and less well-armed - thus able to carry bulky goods faster and more cheaply. On the other hand, prior Dutch possession of the region allowed them to set the terms and regulations for any new entrants to the East-Indies trade - the 'massacre' at Amboina in 1623 being a case in point. The keys to maintaining a trading relationship in areas where there already existed a dominant power came in the need for diplomatic representation, as was expressed in 1613 by Thomas Aldworth's call for 'a sufficient man... that may bee Resident in Agra with the kynge and sutch a one whose person may breede regarde, for they here looke mutche after greate men.'⁶ Having been sent such a man in the shape of Sir Thomas Roe, he managed to secure the promise that 'You can never expect to trade here upon Capitulations that shalbe permanent. Wee must serve the tyme. Some now I have gotten, but by way of *firmaens* and Promise from the Kynge... You shalbe sure of as much priviledge as any stranger, and right when the subject dares not plead his.'⁷ Likewise the Levant Company demanded a formal ambassador at the court of Constantinople, although they were forced to finance this post after Elizabeth I's refusal to do so herself in 1583. However it became clear as well from the actions of the Dutch in the Spice Islands as well as the difficulties faced by slavers and gold traders needing to avoid the castle of Elmina on the Gold Coast that permanent bases were the only sure way of continuing a profitable trade without disturbance from other European powers - although as was the case in 1614 even a permanent base at Surat was not sufficient to dissuade a direct attack by four Portuguese galleons or Portuguese attempts at the court in Agra. It might have been possible for John Hawkins to 'get into his possession, partly by the sworde, and partly by other means, to the number of 300 Negros at the least, besides other merchandises which that countrey yeeldeth'⁸ in 1562, but it was not possible in the face of concerted Portuguese vigilance as well as African reluctance, to trade easily with West Africa without permanent forts. Although on Lok's first voyage to the area in 1555 he reported that 'the said inhabitauntes of that country offred us and our said factors ground to build uppon, if they would make anie fortresses in their countrey, and further offred them assistaunce of certen slaves for those workes without anie charge'⁹ it seems unlikely that in the diplomatic arena of the mid sixteenth century that such an undertaking was conceivable except in new or at least unclaimed territory. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, there were 29 trading forts on the coast of what is now Ghana, predominantly British though by no means entirely so.¹⁰

As the extent of English maritime trade grew, it became increasingly clear that there was a genuine government responsibility that needed to be taken with regard to the government of the trading positions scattered across the world. Previously it had been entirely clear that the English government had no wish to have any direct connection with the speculative ventures of some of its subjects. Patents granted for colonies had been granted by Elizabeth I to Sir Humphrey Gilbert, Sir Richard Grenville, Christopher Carleill, George Peckham & Sir Walter Raleigh,

⁶ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.272

⁷ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.273

⁸ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.121

⁹ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.108

¹⁰ from Cape Coast Castle museum, Cape Coast, Ghana

though none were given any state support either through cash or men. Admittedly there were royal ships often engaged in expeditions especially to areas likely to bring back a cargo of treasure - the most obvious being piratical ventures aimed at the Spanish treasure-ships or in trade with Guinea on the African coast. However these were often done without the direct interest of the monarch, for example the expedition to Guinea in 1554, which used the royal ship *Minion* - however since profits were to be paid not to the privy purse but to the secretary of the navy it could be said that in effect it was merely a business arrangement between the London merchant backers and the Navy Board in order to keep the latter's ships usefully employed. That royal naval ships could be so easily used for an ostensibly peaceful trading mission was unsurprising considering the fact that one of the most profitable of the English overseas 'trades' was indeed piracy, and that the distinction between the Royal Navy and privateers was as yet slight. The composition of naval forces taking part in the Ile de Rhé mission of 1625 shows the blurring quite easily - a royal fleet contained only 10 genuinely royal ships and 90 private ones hired by the government for the course of the campaign. If private vessels were able to take part in military operations like the Ile de Rhé and most clearly of all in the defence of England against the Spanish Armada, they were certainly able and willing to carry out a similar role both in peacetime and without proper authorisation. Between 1585-1603 - quite apart from Drake's two fleets - there were 74 ventures comprising of 183 ships engaged in piracy against the Spanish West Indies. In the short-term, privateering had a diverting and negative impact 1570s-80s on colonisation, as witnessed already above in the crews sent to relieve Roanoke preferring to turn back in search of immediate Spanish prey. However in the longer term, privateering did help build up the shipping industry, men and capital that would prove necessary in subsequent years to properly supply and protect the fledgling colonies especially of North America and the West Indies - certainly it is hard to imagine successful invasions such as those of Hormuz in 1622 or of Jamaica in 1655 without a long history of predatory practice on the high seas. However as it became clear especially after the end of the Thirty Years War that the traditionally highly-armed English merchantman could not compete adequately with more efficient Dutch boats at transporting goods, the designs of English merchant shipping gradually changed to more of a Dutch model, sacrificing offensive power and gaining speed and capacity. In this context there became a growing difference between merchant shipping and vessels designed purely for attack, which came to be more and more in the hands of the government alone. Whereas the Ile de Rhé expedition had had 90 private ships to add to 10 royal ones, the growth of the specialised Royal Navy can be seen from the 1673 Schoonveldt expedition which was composed of 49 royal ships and 0 private.¹¹ In this context, and the increased importance to the English themselves of protecting the rights of free shipping, it seems unsurprising that the amount of pure and simple commercial piracy reduced to relatively low levels, and certainly did not gain as much kudos and reputation as it had done in the days of Drake and Grenville.

The English need for direct overseas trading expansion had come with their inability to provide the home markets with the exotic goods it wanted thanks to the war with Spain and the decline of privateering. In this context the idea of colonisation in areas which could supply such luxuries became increasingly popular with the London merchant community. As Hakluyt put it in 1584: 'all other englishe trades are grown beggarly or dangerous,' whereas 'this westerne voyage will yelde unto us all the commodities of Europe, Affrica and Asia, as farr as we were wonte to travell, and supplye the wantes of all our decayed trades.'¹² Founding permanent colonies was without a doubt a more attractive step for the guarantee of future trade than the reliance on diplomatic niceties with foreign rulers or on precarious and ad hoc arrangements with local traders. The actual products which speculative planters wished to see from their colonial activities also therefore tended to be those which not only filled a gap in the English economy but would also

¹¹ Braddick: *Government, war, trade and settlement* p.288

¹² Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.204

find a ready market abroad. The sponsors of the Berkley plantation in Virginia hoped for 'iron ore, silk grass, mulberry trees, vines, English wheat, maize and other Virginia corn, aniseeds, flax, woade, oilseeds and the like.'¹³ In the early years of each colony, however, times were very hard from a commercial and financial perspective for the founders of such colonies. Not one of Raleigh's colonies either in Virginia or in Guiana made any profit at all either from the products which the colonists made themselves or through becoming a viable base for further piracy on the Spanish Main. Indeed Virginia and Maryland so unpopular that John Hammond felt forced to say in 1656 that: 'such were the odiums and cruell slanders cast on those two famous countries of Virginia and Maryland that they are in danger to moulder away, and come in time to nothing.'¹⁴ Admittedly the future of agriculturally-based colonies was difficult in the context of the difficulty of trade in foodstuffs with England or Ireland, as well as the fact that all of the other colonies proposed along the Classical model by English expansionists such as the Hakluyts were similarly self-sufficient in the necessities of life: therefore profitable trade was extremely difficult, and John Winthrop considered that the colony of Massachusetts would die once immigration faltered, and that they would not be able to pay off their debts since it was difficult to find markets for their mostly agricultural produce. The unexpected success of the sugar trade in Barbados however created a great demand in Europe that more and more land was given to it. The consequent demand for food to feed both the settlers and the unlimited amounts of slave-labour imported from Africa assured New England's economic survival, however. A similar situation occurred, albeit somewhat earlier, in Virginia, which to a large degree was only saved as a colony by the discovery of tobacco as a commercial crop with a ready market in Europe: exports of tobacco were 20,000 pounds in 1617 but this had increased to 350,000 pounds just four years later in 1621.¹⁵

This enormous change in both the *raison d'être* and land-usage of the new overseas colonies created tremendous disruption for many elements of American society, rocked as it already was by a tremendous degree of immigration from England predominantly, but also the Celtic British countries. A first main change was that it was obvious that it was no longer possible for Europeans to live on good terms with the native Indians, and Indian uprisings provided constant difficulties for the early colonists despite the myths which surrounded events such as the visit of Pocahontas to the court of King James. As Sir Francis Wyatt put in the aftermath of the Indian uprising of 1622 'Our first worke is expulsion of the Salvages to gaine the free range of the country for encrease of Cattle, swine &c which will more than restore us, for it is infinitely better to have no heathen among us, who at best were but thornes in our sides, then to be at peace and league with them.'¹⁶ Instead the great immigration of white people from less than a thousand in 1620 to 85,000 by 1700 pushed back the local Indian populations and opened up vast areas for tobacco cultivation. However the vast amounts of land which were now on offer marked a great change for most of the settlers from the cramped and comfortless lives which many had lived in the cities of the England, or even from the village communities in the English countryside. In contrast as Anthony Langston wrote in the 1650s 'Townes and Corporations have likewise been much hindered by our manner of seating the Country; every man having Liberty... to take up Land untaken before and there seat, build, clear and plant without any manner of restraint from the Government.' Thirty years later the French Huguenot Durand of Dauphine said that there 'was neither town nor village in the whole country save one named Gemston.'¹⁷ The vast amount of available land for cultivation clearly also offered great opportunities for personal enrichment for potential colonists. Mr Arundel's letter to Virginia in

¹³ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.10

¹⁴ Horn: *The shaping of English society in the seventeenth century Chesapeake* p.170

¹⁵ Appleby: *War, Politics and Colonisation* p.73

¹⁶ Horn: *The shaping of English society in the seventeenth century Chesapeake* p.176

¹⁷ Horn: *The shaping of English society in the seventeenth century Chesapeake* p.180

1622 predicted that 'any young laborious honest man may in a short time become rich in this country.'¹⁸ Purchas's florid prose had it that: 'the land [Virginia] would Flowe with milke and honey so seconded by your carefull wisdomes and bountifull handes.'¹⁹ The opportunity for enriching colonists was even officially recognised in the official commissions given to the Virginia Company who until 1624 were granted the monopoly of the Virginia trade in much the same way as the other London trading companies. The commission of the Berkley plantation, Virginia specified in 1619 that the intention was 'to erect and build a town called Barkley, and to settle and plant our men and diverse other inhabitants there, to the honour of Almighty God, the enlarging of the Christian religion, and to the augmentation and revenue of the general plantation in that country, and the particular good and profit of ourselves, men and servants as we hope.'²⁰ Virginia was not the only colony where this personal appeal to individual profit was advertised to potential settlers, since the promoters of the almost simultaneous Jacobean plantations of Ulster said in the words of Thomas Blennerhasset that all artisans or experienced husbandmen would 'be in estimation and quickly enriched by their endeavours,' while loiterers and lewd persons in this our new world will not endure.'²¹

Inevitably the high hopes of the immigrant population were not fully realised despite the profitability of tobacco in Virginia and sugar cane plantations on Caribbean islands especially Jamaica and Barbados. For a start, the mortality rate on the other side of the Atlantic was extremely much higher than it was in England. As Richard Beverley described Virginia: 'the Natural Temperature of the Inhabited part of the Country is hot and moist, the Moisture occasion'd by the abundance of low Grounds, Marshes, Creeks and Rivers' - all of which were considered harmful and as early as the 1620s the region was known for its high mortality rate, such that George Gardynier opined that colonists were subject to 'much sickness and death. For the air is exceeding unwholesome, insomuch as one of three scarcely liveth the first year at this time.'²² If there was up to 40% mortality for the first few years for new arrivals in Virginia, the rate for some of the English colonies in the Caribbean was even heavier, such that the 20,000 white population of Barbados had been achieved only with a total immigration up to that date of 150,000 white immigrants. Even those who survived found it hard to create a viable society for some time without the spur of immigration. Chesapeake society was for a long time deeply demographically skewed. Up to six times as many men as women emigrated from England in the 1630s, and although more women emigrated after 1650, even by the end of the seventeenth century there were still three times as many men as women, with 20-30% of men having gone to their graves unmarried. Those marriages which did take place were relatively late, thus helping still further to reduce the birth rate. Governor John Winthrop considered that despite the 21,000 people settling in New England in the 1630s, the colony would die once immigration faltered purely for demographic reasons in addition to the very real hardships placed on new agricultural societies unable to create meaningful amounts of income by trade. A second factor which made life difficult for the majority of settlers was that, despite the success of many settlers in creating new lives for themselves, the most successful settlers were those who as in England had the larger holdings of land, and could profit more from the produce therefrom. The growing trend certainly in the sugar-producing regions for commission agents in London to dominate the trade meant that only those who could afford such agents would be able to prosper to the degree of their more wealthy neighbours, while the enormous influx of slaves again benefited the richer plantation owner much more than it did the average settler. The numbers of settlers returning on the eastbound ships to England must imply that there were significant numbers of settlers who

¹⁸ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.9

¹⁹ Horn: *The shaping of English society in the seventeenth century Chesapeake* p.173

²⁰ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.10

²¹ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.9

²² Horn: *The shaping of English society in the seventeenth century Chesapeake* p.182

did not find the 'Land that would flowe with Milke and Honey' as Samuel Purchas had described it. However this flow of returning settlers was far outweighed by those coming the other way, pushed as much by the over-population of many parts of England as much as pulled by the opportunities for profit placed before them by plantation owners.

As regarded colonisation, the interests of the Crown lay in monitoring the effects they might have on England's position vis-à-vis the leading European nations. A most obvious example of this bias came in the fact that in 1588 Elizabeth forbade Hawkins to sail with reinforcements to Raleigh's Roanoke colony, thus effectively condemning the colony to extinction - the protection of England from the Spanish Armada clearly took precedence over the creation of a strategically useful but by no means vital outpost. However, it was clear that plantations in the outlying regions of the British Isles, notably Ireland and Scotland did form a vital interest, not least inasmuch as it was necessary in order to frustrate other nations' attempts to meddle in these more disaffected areas of the kingdom in order to provoke a rebellion more conducive to their own foreign policy. Colonisation and plantation of these parts of the kingdom provided a method which offered the possibility of securing them more to the acceptance of rule by the monarch in London, or in the case of James VI's plantations in the Highlands and Isles of Harris and Lewis. However even here, tacit support for plantations in Ireland only found formal royal approval after the forcing conditions of the 1579-83 Munster rebellion.²³ Plantations had been planned in Ireland since well before the original landings in Chesapeake Bay had failed, and as in much of America, they took on a decidedly Protestant and religious tone. John Winthrop, later Governor of Massachusetts, expressed a common wish in 1621 by saying: 'I wish oft God would open a way to settle me in Ireland, if it might be for his glory, Amen.' - 'he like thousands of other English, and also Scots, contemplated an involvement with the various state-sponsored plantations in Ireland in preference to gambling on more speculative ventures across the Atlantic or further afield.'²⁴ Ireland did have the distinct advantage in this respect of being firmly in the Old World and thus many of the settlers who found their way especially to the new plantations in Ulster had not travelled too far either from their own homes or considering the strong cultural links with western Scotland, from the world which they could understand. Yet nevertheless if Ireland had not been perceived as fundamentally culturally different from the relatively acquiescent rest of Britain, it seems unlikely that colonisation would ever have received state support in anything like the amount that it eventually did. Protestant sympathies in spreading the Reformation to doggedly Catholic Ireland were shared as a general ideological principle by the government and potential settlers; and Protestantism was promoted by the former as simple expedient since Protestant-style respect for authority and obedience would make for a more ordered and peaceful realm. Certainly many godly settlers felt the need to spread the faith closer to home before spreading it to pure heathens across the oceans in America. Other supporters of the idea of plantation looked at it in more nationalistic and indeed humanistic terms, such as Sir Thomas Smith in his *De Republica Anglorum* of 1570 which made it clear that the only means of extending the 'Commonwealth' of England beyond its historic frontiers was through military conquest followed by the erection of colonies on the Roman model - the Romans, he argued had civilised the Britons by following an almost identical method as was being proposed in the north of Ireland by James I's government. Either way, plantations were strictly reserved for those elements which in the eyes of the government were more reliable and loyal to the united crown of England and Scotland which was worn by James VI & I: the Undertakers in the plantation of Ulster were required to 'plant or place upon a small proportion, the number of 24 able men of the age of 18 years being English or Inland Scottish.'²⁵ In marked contrast to the much more *laissez-faire* attitude adopted by the government to the colonial developments taking place on the

²³ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.12

²⁴ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.6

²⁵ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.8

other side of the Atlantic, plantations in Ulster and in the Highlands of Scotland took place with direct royal approval and interest. They were also directed at the areas which were simultaneously most rebellious and most populated by native Gaelic-speakers - areas which nevertheless could be contrived for publicity purposes to be peculiarly fortunate as a geographical location. As the promoters described Ulster, it was next to the 'great and profitable fishings... in the next isles of Scotland where many Hollanders do fish all the summer season', because it was 'ready for traffic with England and Scotland', and more implausibly it was 'open and convenient for Spain and the Straits, and nearest for Newfoundland.'²⁶

However without doubt the use of colonisation in Gaelic Scotland and Ireland had a deliberate political end, being to dilute the native Gaelic culture in order assimilate the natives more easily into the larger state polity. As Sir William Gerard asked in 1576: 'can the sword teache them to speake Englishe, to use Englishe apparell, to restayne them from Irish axactions and extotions, and to shonne all the manner and orders of the Irishe. Noe it is the rodd of justice that must scower out those blottes.'²⁷ - colonisation and plantation of industrious Protestant stock into the midst of the traditional Irish communities could as he saw it manage to create favourable political situations in a way which the military suppression of three years later could not. It was not just in Ireland that such a tactic was tried, as can be seen from the almost identical complaint from the Edinburgh administration of James VI that 'the Irishe language... is one of the chief and principall causis of the continewance of barbaritie and incivilitie amongis the inhabitantis of the Ilis and Heylandis.'²⁸ Although the measure of introducing settlers into previously intractable areas was designed to obviate the need for military intervention in the future, it was nevertheless heavily dependent on this in order for settlement to be possible. The plantations in Munster for example could only come about since they were based originally on confiscated estates forfeited by rebellious Irish lords, especially the Earl of Desmond's estates in Munster. Grants ranging from 4,000 to 12,000 acres were subsequently given to 35 English landlords, making for a total of 20,000 settlers promised land, of whom 12,000 were already present by the end of the sixteenth century. Likewise further colonisation became more possible on confiscated Irish land after the rebellions of 1642 and 1690 - a great relief for the victors and their financiers, 1,533 of whom had subscribed money for the Irish wars of the 1640s in the hopes of profiting from the victory. Military action also depopulated the areas of combat, which further released land for use at the discretion in the aftermath of Cromwell's invasion of Parliament and after 1690 of the new king. Although the original proposal to send 35,000 settlers to the newly depopulated areas descended into acrimony in England over the payment and remuneration of the soldiers, significant numbers of English and Scots Protestants settled in Ulster especially, in the years following 1641-2, and the government's targets for reducing the amount of land left in the ownership of Catholic notables declined equally sharply. Whereas in 1641 61% of the land was owned by Catholics, by 1688 the figure had declined to 22%, while by 1704 just 14% remained in the hands of Catholic landlords.²⁹ New settlers also brought their existing social institutions with them from the mainland and as with England in the same period, the growing commercial basis of the food-trade led to a more commercial bias of land relations in Ireland as well. For one thing, efficiency savings added to price rises for staple foods ensured that rentals rocketed, and example being on the Gray estate on the Till valley on the Borders of Scotland, which went up from £1,000 in 1590s to £7-8,000 in 1620; likewise, the MacLeod estates on the islands of Skye and Harris rose from £66 in 1600 to £675 in 1638. However, far from allowing the landlords to prosper in the manner of landlords in the south of England, the influx of more cosmopolitan English and Scottish immigrants brought some of their English fashions with them, and

²⁶ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.11

²⁷ Ohlmeyer *Colonisation within Britain and Ireland 1580s-1640s* p.134

²⁸ Ohlmeyer *Colonisation within Britain and Ireland 1580s-1640s* p.134

²⁹ Barnard: *British Settlement in Ireland* p. 312

landlords now felt the need to keep up with them. Building work for fine houses, sumptuous clothing and visits to court along with rising legal and taxation costs had to be met by the produce of land greatly less fertile than that of much of England. Despite large estates, therefore, the great expenses lords took on had to be paid from only relatively small incomes, a fact which drove many apparently wealthy families into debt, an example being Sir Rory MacLeod of Dunvegan, who at his death in 1626 owed £1000, while a generation later these as-yet unpaid family debts had reached £4,500.³⁰ By the late 1630s, the Earl of Antrim owed £42,000, a debt which was only paid off by him mortgaging no less than 19 properties on the Strand in London, together with the entire barony of Cary, the lordship of Ballycastle and Rathlin Island.

A notable new factor that emerged most tellingly during the settlement of the province of Ulster was the terms 'British' and 'Britain' especially under James I. The novelty of a unified crown on James's head was still great enough to ensure that there were as yet no expansionist connotations to the word, and it described an uneasy yet idealistic concept of a united country that was manifestly not the case in practice if not in law. Indeed the only time in which the word was used at this time was in the context of the colonisation of Ulster by Scots and English Protestants - described as 'British Protestants' and 'Britaines.'³¹ Even when considering subsequent colonial and overseas ventures, even the proponents continued to see them purely in individual national terms. Samuel Purchas as an example hoped for the 'dispersal through the world' of 'England's out of England' but also in 'Royal Scotland, Ireland and Princely Wales, multiplying new Sceptres to his Majesty and his heirs in a New World.'³² Certainly it remained the case that Scots and English colonists tended to keep separate in the Ulster plantations, as can be seen from a letter sent by Mr Taylor of Armagh in 1622. He asked that the lands in the southern side of County Monaghan should be reserved for English planters, while 'for the waste land on the north side... to which the English will hardly be drawn; it were good to set it to Scotch men... the Scotch shall be as a wall betwixt them and the Irish though whose quarter the Irish will not pass to carry any stealths.'³³ That this distrust was mutual can be seen from the advice given to the Earl of Annandale by Lord Balfour of Glenawley that he 'should never trust any English in that place', since they would merely deceive him by 'fair shows and protestations.' It is certainly the case that more Scots settled in Ulster than did subsequently in other overseas ventures, though the reasons for this are not entirely clear. Almost 30,000 people had migrated from Scotland to Ulster by 1641, a figure which by its very height implies that in later periods Scotland did not have same levels of overpopulation as did England - an overpopulation that resulted in more widespread emigration to the colonies. It is certainly the case that English merchants and settlers were predominant in this period in the sphere of overseas expansion - one need only look at the Scottish Darien expedition of 1705-6 to see the difficulty which Scottish merchants faced in trying to break into a colonial trade pattern from which they had been vigorously excluded by the English. Scottish Covenanters therefore needed to demand 'liberty of commerce and trade... throughout the veins of all his Majesty's dominions' as well as free membership of trading companies and abolition of internal customs barriers - wishes that were only granted after the passing of the Act of Union in 1707.

Apart from the great royal interest in regulating the composition and success of plantations of Protestants in Catholic and Gaelic parts of the British Isles, the Crown was extremely slow in regarding the overseas colonies as being vital interests. The monopolies granted to trading companies apparently absolved it from having to intervene directly. However the governance of genuine colonies was somewhat different to the trading posts which were the norm up to that

³⁰ Ohlmeyer *Colonisation within Britain and Ireland 1580s-1640s* p.142

³¹ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.2

³² Canny: *The origins of empire* p.2

³³ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.13

point. Certainly when the Virginia Company was dissolved in 1624, it was found that the colony was a picture of mismanagement, aggravated by the fact that the 1622 Indian attack had meant that the colony was 'almost shattered to pieces, and brought to a very low and calamitous condition.' Although it was taken over as the first royal colony, by placing it directly under the control of the Privy Council, no extra money was granted to it or any special privileges. Certainly by 1625, there appeared to be no very significant need for better regulation of English colonial possessions: there were in any case only very scattered populations: several thousand in the Chesapeake, 1,500 in Bermuda, and several hundred in New England, Newfoundland, Guiana and the Caribbean. As Robert Harcourt put it, there were 'a few dispersed men, being altogether without Governement.'³⁴ However it was the enormous increase in populations which the American and Caribbean colonies acquired - 378,000 between 1630-70 - that meant that there was an increased importance for the central government if not to directly rule then at least regulate. At that time in any case, colonial trade and colonies were becoming more and more appreciated by the Crown, since customs revenue soon became a vital source of royal income. Imports of tobacco even as early as 1610 were listed in Book of Rates as being worth £60,000 per year, and the quantity imported after this date increased so much that the price collapsed in 1620-30s from over 20 shillings to a few pence per pound.³⁵ The development of more sophisticated methods of assessing customs and the introduction of excise duties again led the Crown to value more the role of international commerce in producing her own revenues. It was this greater emphasis on indirect taxation which made fraud scandals, such as the variable compressing of tobacco leaves inside barrels in Liverpool in 1702-5 and Glasgow 20 years later into such a serious issue. In addition, colonies increased in importance even on the diplomatic stage as the protection of trade with them became the staple of economic and actual warfare in the period from the middle of the seventeenth century onwards. It is impossible to imagine there being Anglo-Dutch wars in the middle of the seventeenth century without colonial rivalry in the Far East, nor the series of colonial wars with the French beginning in 1689. Of these factors, undoubtedly the most important one would be the need for genuine economic regulation on the part of central government and for close enforcement of the Navigation Act of 1651.

Yet there were also growing internal pressures for a more direct rule from the colonies themselves, results of a mixture of social and political factors largely the responsibility of the government in creating them in the first place. Firstly, the composition of the local populations were changing, especially in the Caribbean colonies. Political experiments such as the transportation of criminals away from the European world required careful scrutiny, as did the Irish Catholics & Scottish soldiers who had been transported for resisting Cromwell in 1641-2 and on his Scottish campaign of several years later. Agitation for more liberties proved to be a significant factor in island politics especially, since settlers from England, Ireland, Scotland, Protestant, Catholic and non-conformist all bid to be granted the rights of 'British' people. R.B. perceived that in any case colonial government was moving more to an English model and described the result in Jamaica where 'the Laws... are as like those of England as the differences of the countries will admit.'³⁶ Certainly the furtherance of profitable trade required a stable and effective legal system for resolving trade disputes - and in all cases English law came to be applied along with the inevitable increase in government responsibility towards the colonies which this required. However ironically, despite these tentative moves towards the acquisition of a colonial empire based on rights, there were exclusions. The increased slave population - reaching 55,000 compared with just 7,000 whites in Jamaica in 1713 - introduced a further element into the social mixture, and for them as for the native American Indians, freedoms becoming the exception rather than the rule. The removal of liberties also nullified some of the

³⁴ Appleby: *War, Politics and Colonisation* p.77

³⁵ Andrews: *Trade, plunder and settlement* p.295

³⁶ Canny: *The origins of empire* p.24

earlier legitimising propaganda used by the settlers of arriving in order to spread Christian religion.

In conclusion, colonial ventures created a great deal of profit for those who engaged on them, though the risks were often extremely high. For settlers and sailors alike, death by tropical disease was a constant possibility, though the additional risks for sailors of shipwreck or starvation were also major threats. The upheaval of moving from one continent to another and starting a new life from scratch proved a major difficulty until floods of immigrants stabilised the new colonial economies. Even for those remaining at home yet venturing their capital if nothing else, the risk of shipwrecks or piracy could bankrupt families at a stroke. Yet despite this the greater number of people engaged in the expansion of overseas trade brought through the acquisition of empire saw their wealth grow by a very great degree. Trade, especially long-distance trade, was immensely profitable, inasmuch as centuries-old patterns were available to be formed anew and luxuries only previously heard of suddenly became available.